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[PADDLEBOARDING]



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Kanesa Duncan won the women's division of the Hennessey's International Paddleboard Championships yesterday.

Mitchell grabs 1 more

By Brandon Lee
Special to the Star-Bulletin

Another race, another win for Jamie Mitchell.

That's the only way it has gone in any paddleboarding competition the last three years as long as the Australian sensation has been involved.

Same was the case yesterday, as the 27-year-old from Queensland was the first to cross the finish line at Waimea Bay for the third annual Hennessey's International Paddleboard Championships.

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To continue winning "feels super good, but (the race) was super hard," said Mitchell, also \$1,150 richer with the result. "The first half there was bumps (swells to ride), but after that it was pretty much flat the whole way. But this is pretty satisfying -- this is as good a title as there is out there."

It was the second consecutive year that Mitchell covered the 6.5-mile, near-shore course that starts at the Turtle Bay Resort in the quickest time, finishing ahead of the 131 other competitors yesterday in 1 hour, 3 minutes and 6 seconds. He set the course record in 2003 at just under an hour, at 59:59, and also won the event in 2002, when it was held in California.

Paddleboards are essentially streamlined surfboards designed to ride open-ocean swells, which the athletes arm-paddle either on their knees or prone.

The Hennessey's is the last race before the Quiksilveredition Molokai to Oahu Paddleboard Race next Sunday. That 32-mile crossing of the Kaiwi Channel is considered the world championship of the sport, and Mitchell enters it as the two-time defending overall champion, and with an opportunity to become the first to earn that distinction three times.

"Everyone's beatable, and I'm no different," Mitchell said. "But I'll put myself in the hospital to win, so if someone is gonna beat me, they're gonna have to do the same."

The first four finishers yesterday were all from Australia. Finishing exactly a minute behind Mitchell after a tight battle for second place, and winning \$650, was Jackson English (1:04:06). Mick Dibetta (1:04:08) took third and \$450, while Aaron Bitmead -- who led at the outset but could not withstand a move Mitchell made at Backyards, just before Sunset Point -- placed fourth (1:04:12).

English finished third the previous two years at the Quiksilveredition, while Bitmead (2001) and Dibetta (1997) are past world champs. Because of work commitments English isn't going to be gunning to beat Mitchell next week after so far trying in vain during the three-year run, but he's also not sure anyone who is will be successful, either.

"Jamie's just fantastic at the moment. He's so strong, and he reads the ocean so well ... and just has got that something extra," English, 29, said. "I'd love to beat him one day, but at this rate it's gonna be a very long time before someone does."

The first Hawaii paddler to cross was Hawaii Kai lifeguard Brian Rocheleau (1:05:47), who finished seventh overall and second in the unlimited (boards averaging 16 feet in length) men's ages 18-29 division.

Rocheleau finished runner-up to Mitchell in last year's

Quiksilveredition, less than two minutes behind, and still likes his chances again this year despite finishing behind the lead pack of Aussies at the Hennessey's.

"I tried to follow them and get on their line, but they just started walking away and there was not much I could do," said the 28-year-old Rocheleau. "They're real fast ... but I feel pretty good about (the Quiksilveredition) race. Hopefully it's not flat like last year."

The first woman to cross was University of Hawaii graduate student Kanesa Duncan (1:17:59). California's Jane Cairns (1:20:35) placed second, Japan's Chitose Iwanami (1:21:25) third.

"There's bumps in the beginning -- and I'm much better in that kind of water -- and then it flattens out," Duncan, 28, said. "But it's an excellent race, because it has both kinds of water and it's a true test of paddleboarding. It's a great warmup for Molokai."

Duncan picked up \$850 with the result, and enters next week's Quiksilveredition as the women's favorite after winning in 2001 and '02. Last year's Hennessey's and Quiksilveredition champ, Hayley Bateup of Australia, chose not to participate in either race this year and instead train for the World Lifesaving Games in Italy in September.

Other notable winners yesterday included Australia's Tim Foran (1:10:02) in the 12-foot stockboard division, and Pupukea's Matt Barnett (1:09:51) in the unlimited men's 50-59. Barnett's time was good for 18th overall, and Foran's 19th.

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